

## **Ermatine Copeland**

***Interviewed by Duwuan Johnson (2002)***

My name is Ermatine Dennis Copeland, and my nickname is Tina. I was born in 1931. The depression was going on when I was born, then, when I was young World War II was going on. I remember the bombing of Pearl Harbor. I had four uncles in the war. There were a lot of things going on. We had rationing during the war, so there was very little sugar or butter, you couldn't get tires for your car. And it was very hard to travel because the trains and buses were needed by the military. During that time, my mother was working at the plant where they made tanks, and my father was working for Ford Motors, where they were doing a lot of military work, too.

I was born in Columbus Georgia, but I went to school in Lima, Ohio. I lived in Columbus Georgia until I was twelve. It was very racist. You know "yes sir", "yes ma'am," white bathrooms, black bathrooms. I remember my friend's sister worked for a white family ... you'd go in the back door.

Besides Georgia, I've lived in Ohio, and in Detroit, Michigan, then I moved to Boston. I was an only child growing up. I always wanted brothers and sisters. Now I have nine children — six girls and three boys, and I have 17 grand children, and 4 great grand children. I lived with my parents, and once I went to visit my uncle and his wife, they lived in the country. I would also visit with my grandfather—that was my mother's father. He lived on a farm, and he had all kinds of fruit trees and watermelon, stuff like that. My mother's younger sister lived there ... she was about 6 years older than I am, so we were always together.

When we were young I loved to go to the movies, roller skate and take bike rides ... and visit my grandparents. That's what I did on weekends. To get around from place to place, we mostly took buses. It was fun walking, though. We did that a lot too.

I remember when I was about ten, I loved children, so I got all the neighborhood kids and took them to the ice cream place. I had about ten or eleven of them! Back then you could get ice cream for a nickel, a big ice cream cone. So we sat down on the sidewalk and we ate the ice cream. Then, when we finished, I took those kids and we just walked and walked. By the time we got back home to my mother ... the police was there! They didn't know where we were. The children didn't mind, you know. I was the oldest one in the group — the rest were like five and six years old. That didn't bother me. Nobody bothered us. We just walked around.

Usually, when we went in to the drug store they would say, "Where's your mother? Where 's your father? Where did you get the money from?" and that kind of thing. Nobody bothered us that day, but their parents were scared to death because they didn't know who the children was with. My mother told me that one of the neighbors said, "You know I'm gonna tell you where the kids are ... wherever Ermatine is, that's where the kids are."

You know people used to just put their babies in the carriage and leave them on the sidewalk. I would get'em and take them home and tell my mother they didn't have any mother. So she would say, "Take that baby back!" And I'd say, "But the baby don't have a mother or a father. The baby was on the sidewalk." My aunts teased me about that after I got grown. Eventually, I had nine children of my own. Every time we turned around you had somebody's baby in the house. I love children and you know my mother said she never thought I would have as many kids as I did, because usually when people like kids, they don't have any.

When I live in Columbus, Georgia I went to an all black school — all the students and the teachers were black. Then I moved to Ohio when I was twelve, and there we had both black and white students in the school, but all the teachers were white. Even in high school we had all white teachers ... no black teachers. I didn't have any trouble with my teachers, but I did have trouble with some of the white children who came from the south. You see growing up in the south, and since my aunt worked for a white family, I was use to being around white people and playing with both black and white children. We just knew what we were suppose to do and what not to do. But in Ohio, some of the white children who came from the south weren't use to going to school with black children, so they would get upset, use the 'n' word, things like that. A lot of the kids who were born and raised in Ohio let them know that wasn't nice.

My parents weren't too strict, but they always would know everything I was doing. Sometimes I might do something without telling them, then when I'd ask if I could go roller skating or something, they would say "Oh no, because you did that such and such the other day!" I'd be shocked, because they hadn't said a word, and I thought they didn't know! Another thing my mother didn't like was when I would have my friends ask her if I could do something or go someplace. At first she would say yes every time I had a friend ask for me. Then one day, there was a big party that was going to happen, and my mother said "You can't go ... and don't you bother having your friends ask if you can go, either." But I had my friend ask anyway, and my mother gave me the worst beating I ever had ... right in front of my friend! It was the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to me. I think I was fourteen at that time.

When I was 17 I was married ... I was very young. I got married in Lima Ohio, and one of my children was born there. The rest were scattered all about, born in different places. I had a lot of friends when I got married, we were all married with babies, so we would do the same things ... go for walks with the babies or take them to the movies ... you can't do that now.

I like spring and early fall. I don't care for summer because it's too hot, and hot weather bothers me. When I was younger, it didn't bother me, but now it does. Winter? I could take it or leave it. If I'm going out, I'm gonna bundle-up well to be sure I will be warm. I don't go anyplace where I'm going to have to be out in it too much.

My favorite kinds of music are rhythm and blues, jazz, and gospel music. Oh, yes, I love to dance. I use to dance often, but my friend got sick and he passed away just before I moved here last April. My family and friends have asked me if I wanted to go with them, but I haven't yet because it just wouldn't be the same. I do love to dance, but I'm just not ready to go back to it yet.

My favorite pastimes are ... well, I love to read, and work crossword puzzles when I can really concentrate on them. I love to play with my grandson. In fact, I just had him over for the weekend. He just went home this morning!

When my grandfather died — I was very attached to him — and I didn't understand where he was, and why he wasn't here. That was very hard for me. But with my children, and when I started having grandchildren, I began to realize all those things my grandfather did for me and my aunt, well, he did them out of love ... like letting us eat all the watermelon, or eat a bunch of candy and then get sick. When he died, they broke up the farm, and all of that disappeared.